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Jeffrey Lewis. *The 2020 Commission Report on the North Korean Nuclear Attacks against the United States.* Boston: Mariner Books, 2018. 307 pp. $15.99, paper, ISBN 978-1-328-57391-9.

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"Former president Trump was emphatic that the commission note his score, which was one stroke under par … the commission understands that the step of noting the president's golf score may seem out of place in such a document," reads one footnote that highlights the dark wit that is prevalent throughout ***The 2020 Commission Report on the North Korean Nuclear Attacks against the United States*** (p. 131). In his work, Jeffrey Lewis weaves a frighteningly plausible, prefactual account that walks the reader through one possible path to a nuclear confrontation with North Korea. The specific incidents that constitute the chain of events would seem far-fetched were they not grounded by well-documented, real-world occurrences.

Lewis marries the risks posed by past and present policy choices with luck to set events in motion. Against the backdrop of the annual FOAL EAGLE/KEY RESOLVE exercises and in response to the failure of talks that began during the 2018 Olympics, the Trump administration revives a Cold War-era psychological operations concept and begins probing North Korean air defenses as an intimidation tactic and to show resolve. Regularly scheduled strategic bomber sorties begin to fly at North Korea's border as if conducting an attack run and turn away at the last moment. Although a CIA memo warns that the operation's previous incarnation "had resulted in the loss of both military and civilian aircraft and ships" and that it was "a significant factor in the Soviet shootdown of [a Korean Airlines jet] in 1983," the White House opts to continue the effort (p. 12). History repeats itself after four uneventful months of probing when an untimely flight instrument and radio failure that is known to occur occasionally on Airbus A320-model aircraft causes a South Korean airliner to deviate from its flight plan and coincidentally match the route of a recent bomber sortie. North Korea mistakes the civilian jet for an American bomber and fires a surface-to-air missile at it, killing all 228 passengers aboard.

Memory of the political disaster stemming from a public perception of inaction following the North's 2014 sinking of the passenger ferry MV ***Sewol*** colors South Korea's response to the event. Determined to avoid making the same mistakes, President Moon Jae-in opts for a limited punitive strike against the North Korean Air Force headquarters and a Kim family compound. The South does not consult its American counterparts before firing its missiles out of fear that the United States will put the brakes on any military action and continue to treat the South like a junior partner. While the intent is to give a proportional response that limits casualties and communicates restraint,

fate would have it that Kim Jong Un receives a different message.

Seeking shelter in a basement, Kim is unable to establish contact with his air and missile forces when, unbeknownst to him at the time, the headquarters building collapses entirely due to shoddy construction. Furthermore, he is unable to communicate with government officials when the Pyongyang cell phone network becomes inundated with traffic. President Trump unwittingly feeds North Korean fears, tweeting "LITTLE ROCKET MAN WON'T BE BOTHERING US MUCH LONGER" (p. 107)! As the view from the basement begins to increasingly match predictions of what a preemptive decapitation strike would look like based on analysis of the opening hours of the 1991 Gulf War, Kim decides to send fifty-four nuclear warheads to targets in South Korea, Japan, Guam, and Hawaii.

The slim window of opportunity to spare the US homeland closes when the North Korean delegation to the UN destroys its communications equipment while defecting as American warplanes begin a campaign against mobile missile launchers and key leadership targets. With no channel through which to inform the North that the initial strikes against it were unilateral and conducted without the American government's knowledge, a partially successful strike against Kim's bunker spooks the North Korean president into ordering the launch of thirteen additional long-range missiles against targets in the continental United States, including New York, Washington, DC, and Trump's Mar-A-Lago residence. While some of the weapons miss their targets, others make it past unreliable American missile defenses and wreak havoc on major urban centers. Trump says, "Absolutely beautiful," crying, as he sees his vacation property vaporized while narrowly escaping aboard Air Force One (p. 228).

Several of the key personas that Lewis employs in his story, such as James Mattis and Nikki Haley, have left the Trump administration in the year and a half between the completion of the book and this review. However, this does not detract from the credibility of the narrative. If anything, it makes the main thread more believable as moderating influences depart the administration and as strategic messaging to US allies and potential adversaries becomes less predictable.

Although the work is grim fiction based on past and present events extrapolated into the future, Lewis highlights several of the relevant conundrums confronting nuclear policy today. Can one really know how an adversary is interpreting signals sent both intentionally and unintentionally? Considering that the United States never uses a nuclear weapon against North Korea in this scenario, what are the limits of the US arsenal in achieving deterrence? Is it time to reconsider the nuclear command and control process and the president's role in it? Is civil defense up to the task of responding to a real-life event? While the author gives no direct answers, the book does serve as a worthwhile conversation starter.

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